

# WALK TALK AND CHALK

## PARKING OFFICERS IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE



VALID  
24 OCT 2007 – 15 FEB 2008  
WED WED  
CITY GALLERY  
MELBOURNE TOWN HALL  
SWANSTON STREET

HOURS  
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM  
MONDAY  
11:00 AM – 6:00 PM  
TUE – THU

HOURS  
11:00 AM – 6:30 PM  
FRIDAY  
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM  
SATURDAY

### PARKING IS AN EMOTIVE ISSUE

Thinking rationally, most of us accept the need for parking restrictions and enforcement. The system keeps the city moving and ensures that parking spaces get shared around. It's just that we don't like it when we're the one who gets pinged with a parking infringement notice. For many of us, the sight of a ticket on the windscreen suddenly turns parking enforcement into an affront against our personal liberty.

Parking Officers surely figure amongst the most maligned functionaries in our city. Like umpires at the footy, they're inevitably in the firing line. It's not the most popular job in the world, but someone has to do it.

This exhibition presents aspects of the history, the mechanisms and devices that have been used to regulate parking in the City of Melbourne. Above all, it asks the question: who are these people that enforce road rules and municipal by-laws? It invites parking officers to speak for themselves about their job, to provide insights into the hazards and attractions of life on the city streets. The exhibition encourages you to suspend your prejudices – and to make sure you've put enough money in the meter.

### PARKING OFFICERS

*Politicians, used car salesmen,  
the taxman – in terms of popularity  
we'd be somewhere above those guys,  
but probably a bit below Miss World.*  
Graham McKinnon

*You have to remember that, most of the  
time, they're not yelling at me personally.  
They might be yelling at the uniform or  
at the Council. But, mainly, they're yelling  
at themselves for making a mistake.*  
David English

*Imagine if there weren't any Parking Officers  
patrolling the streets – it'd be chaos!*  
Jorge Contreras

### PROTESTING MOTORISTS

*I can't think of a reason why I should  
give you my money because your meter  
short-changed me. I'm afraid if I go along  
with this I may as well stand in Bourke  
Street and drop my pants, then everyone  
will have a chance of getting up me.*  
Letter to Council, 1982

*Anyway, I'm puffing away on my smoke  
and I go to look back at my car which was  
just behind me, and what do you know?  
F@#!\* parking warden!! (Cheeky little  
bugger snuck up behind me.)*  
Letter to Council, 2007

### PARKING REGULATION IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE – A CURSORY HISTORY

Problems with the parking of motor vehicles in the city became increasingly apparent throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with newspaper reports and Council documents referring to congested thoroughfares and complaints by city traders about vehicles obstructing their street frontage and damaging their business. A 1926 report by Council's Traffic and Building Regulation Committee expressed frustration at the behaviour of motorists ignoring designated parking areas and wilfully obstructing traffic, particularly in Little Finders, Little Collins and Little Bourke Streets. By the early 1930s the Council was testing out controversial approaches such as angle parking in Collins Street and St.Kilda Road and the introduction of no-parking zones in Swanston Street.

The Melbourne City Council By-Laws & Traffic Branch was formed during a police strike in 1922 with the recruitment of Police Officers that were sacked from the force. A 1930 photograph shows a group of some forty By-Laws and Traffic Officers, immaculately attired in military tunics and high-crowned white helmets. In 2007, the City of Melbourne's Parking & Traffic Branch employs around 150 full-time staff, two-thirds of whom patrol the streets.

Parking Meters are an American invention, first trialled in Oklahoma City in 1935. In Melbourne, meters first appeared in 1955 with the installation of 350 mechanical, coin-operated devices. These days, parking meters and ticket machines are electronic units, increasingly designed to accept payment by credit card rather than coins. There are more than ten thousand metered parking spaces throughout the municipality.

Until 1959, Officers were largely occupied selling parking tickets directly to motorists and enforcing punitive action for non-compliance. A motorist accused of unauthorised parking would be summonsed to court where a Magistrate could issue a fine. A new Road Traffic Act brought about the introduction of on-the-spot infringement notices and allowed payment of parking fines without record of conviction. In 1974 Victoria Police handed over to the City Council full responsibility for enforcement of parking infringements within the Central Business District. Prior to this, the Police issued infringements for certain parking offences (such as parking in No Standing zones) whilst Council Officers booked vehicles that overstayed time limits in designated parking areas. Contrary to popular myth, Parking Officers in the city of Melbourne have never worked to a quota system with incentives or bonuses for booking the maximum number of vehicles. The stated objective of parking enforcement is to encourage 'voluntary compliance'.

The Council employed its first female officers in 1979. Councillor Clare Cascarel designed a special uniform consisting of a peach coloured blouse, a black bow tie, a yellow jacket and a brown skirt, accompanied by a brown overcoat and handbag. This uniform was changed in the early 1980s to a grey and blue ensemble that conformed more closely to the men's uniform.

Over the years Council By-Laws & Traffic Officers have undertaken wide-ranging duties. They've regulated parking at sporting venues. They've enforced special traffic conditions and road closures in relation to major events within the city. Council Motorcycle Officers have escorted Moomba Festival Floats and, at one stage, were even responsible for after-hours delivery of official papers to the homes of Councillors. By-Laws Officers have served summonses and delivered other legal documents, provided an escort for the delivery of the council payroll and served as security guards at the Lord Mayor's Annual Dinner. Out amongst the traffic, they've identified stolen, abandoned or unregistered vehicles, collected parking fees from off-street Council car parks and supervised School Crossing Attendants.

At various times, Parking Officers have taken industrial action to protest Council decisions or to oppose the imposition of specific tasks and regulations. On one occasion Officers imposed a work-to-rule in protest against the sacking of an officer for growing a beard in contravention of Council guidelines. A year later, they staged a sit-in at the Town Hall to protest unhygienic conditions at the By-Laws and Traffic Branch depot in Franklin Street. As the largest Branch within the Council, By-Laws & Traffic (or *Traffic & Parking*, as it is currently constituted) has been able to exercise considerable industrial clout and, to this day, maintains almost full union membership.

Traffic Officers have got around the city on motorbikes and bicycles, in Mini-Mokes, Bongo Vans, utes and sedans and, more than anything else, on foot. Uniforms have been changed at regular intervals, but sensible footwear has always been *de rigueur*.

### PINKIES, GREY GHOSTS AND METER CHEATERS – A GLOSSARY

There's a distinct colloquial vernacular attached to the subject of parking regulations. Here are some choice terms, decoded for the uninitiated:

**Grey Ghosts:** For decades this term had wide currency as a popular name for Melbourne's Parking Officers. Initially inspired by the grey Parking Officers' uniform introduced in the 1970s, the term also conjures the image of a menace materialising unexpectedly to prey upon the unsuspecting motorist.

**Pinky:** In the 1970s and '80s this was a popular name for the parking ticket that a motorist might find affixed to the windscreen of their vehicle. In the 1990s the colour of parking tickets was changed from pink to white, rendering this term obsolete. (A related and still extant term is *Canary*, referring to the yellow sticker affixed to a car windscreen by Police Officers, signifying that a vehicle is unroadworthy).

**P.I.N.S.:** Bureaucratic acronym for *Parking Infringement Notices*, popularly referred to simply as *parking tickets*.

**Walk, talk and chalk:** a phrase sometimes used by Parking Officers to describe their working routine, marking up tyres and instructing motorists.

**Straw the meter:** One of many techniques employed over the years by *Meter Cheaters*, in this case the practice of jamming a mechanical parking meter by inserting a plastic drinking straw into the coin slot.

**Cool-hand Luke:** A colloquial term used in reference to someone vandalising or stealing money from a parking meter, inspired by the character played by Paul Newman in the 1967 movie of the same name.

**Brown Bombers:** the Sydney equivalent of *Grey Ghosts*, similarly coined in reference to the colour of Parking Officers' uniforms.

### MALCOLM MCKINNON CURATOR

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Historical information sourced largely from scrapbooks in the collection of David English and from Robert Green's 1998 report *A Historical Account of Parking, Traffic and By-Laws and the City of Melbourne*.



Gordon Loudon, Parking Enforcement Officer, 1974



Parking Officers manning Council information display at Royal Melbourne Show, 1958



Morning roster session, 1985 (photograph by Carolyn Lewens)



Parking Officer Maureen Carr, 1985 (photograph by Carolyn Lewens)



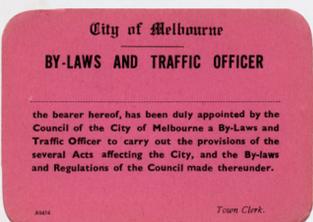
Melbourne City Council Parking Officers Football Team, late 1980s



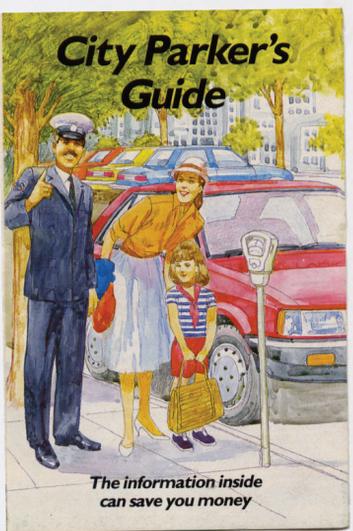
Parking Officers shoulder patch, early 1990s



Parking Meter label plate, late-1960s



Officer's identification card, c.1940s



City Parker's Guide: Melbourne City Council brochure, early-1980s

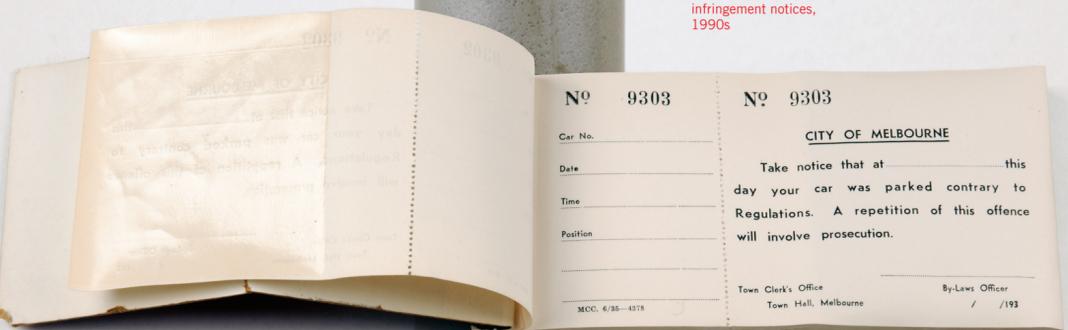


Parking Officer's home made chalk holder, c.1980s

Sticker from public-relations campaign, mid-1980s



AutoCITE machine for issuing parking infringement notices, 1990s



Early book of parking infringement notices, 1930s